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**Translation into Dance: Adaptation and Transnational Hellenism in Balanchine’s *Apollo*.**

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THINKING BEYOND “SOURCES”

The critical discourse on Stravinsky’s and Balanchine’s 1928 ballet, *Apollon Musagète* (later shortened to *Apollo*), has uncovered a full array of sources that figured into the ballet’s genesis, including painting and sculpture (Brancusi, Michaelangelo), previous ballets (French court ballet, Petipa, Fokine, Goleizovsky, Nijiinski), literary sources (Boileau’s poetry, the St. Petersburg journal, *Apollon*, Volynsky’s plans for a ballet called *Birth of Apollo*), and various modernisms (symbolism, constructivism, retrospectivism). It is also widely acknowledged that ancient Greek sources played a significant role, in particular, Stravinsky’s appropriation of ancient metrics (accessed primarily through Boileau’s use of the Alexandrine) and the archaic Greek *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. In the ballet’s scenario, Stravinsky adapted the Homeric hymn’s narrative of Apollo’s birth and assumption of power, and Balanchine’s choreography, added to Stravinsky’s musical adaptation,transformed that narrative further into the vocabulary of dance. Although identifying sources that figured into the creation of a work of art allows us to catch a glimpse of the creative process, in many cases we must go further to ask more precise questions about the particular use and transformation of the source material. In the case of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, scholars have not yet worked in depth on questions concerning how and to what end Balanchine’s ballet transforms, “translates”, or adapts the hymn. In fact, it has not yet been acknowledged that the ballet should be viewed as a kind of translation or adaptation of the hymn. Questions about how the ballet employs and transforms the hymn prove especially significant, I will argue, because even though *Apollo* is often said to be “plotless”, or at least a precursor to Balanchine’s later plotless ballets, its narrative is neither simple nor unimportant to the ballet’s meaning and relation to the whole Balanchine repertoire.

Just as translation theory and adaptation theory have had to overcome the moralistic orientation of “fidelity discourse”, which privileges the source text and holds the translation or adaptation to an ideal of authenticity, so too Classicists have taken great strides in reorienting how they view of the reception of the Classical tradition. With the full recognition that the ancient sources themselves are in many cases re-workings of earlier versions comes an expansion that now has Classicists studying a vast array of literary and artistic works from antiquity to the contemporary world as transformations of Greco-Roman and subsequent sources that not only have value in their own right, but also exist as steps in the evolution and transformation of the tradition itself. The Classical tradition extends to the present day, and it changes, sometimes radically, as it works its way globally through various cultural, social, political, intellectual, and artistic contexts. I suspect that giving up the essentialism traditionally inherent in the field of Classics – that is, the view that there is some core essence of, say, the Oedipus myth, that must be present in a subsequent incarnation in order for it to count as “the Oedipus myth” – proves more difficult for many of us, simply because we are so immersed in the particular ancient sources that we know so well. However, we would all do well to consider carefully the alternative articulated, for example, by Robert Stam: “Hidden within *War and Peace*, it is assumed, there is an originary core, a kernel of meaning or nucleus of events that can be ‘delivered’ by an adaptation. But in fact there is no such transferable core: a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of the narrative itself. The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context. The text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation.” [[1]](#footnote-1) Martindale’s important work on Classical reception both contests “the idea that classics is something fixed, whose boundaries can be shown, and whose essential nature we an understand on its own terms”[[2]](#footnote-2), and proposes a model according to which “the sharp distinction between antiquity itself and its reception over the centuries is dissolved.”[[3]](#footnote-3) It is in a spirit modified by these recent developments in translation theory, adaptation theory, and reception theory that I would like to consider the use of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. One of my goals is to show that this ballet effects a significant step in the evolution of the myth of Apollo, and one that, given the ballet’s long-standing popularity, can be seen as a uniquely successful[[4]](#footnote-4) adaptation of the myth, and for other reasons, a compelling use of the myth. In addition to examining the particular selections, the additions, subtractions, expansions, and distillations to which the ballet subjects the myth, I will be particularly interested in the process of transmediation, that is, the significance of adapting the verbal medium of the Homeric hymn to the non-verbal medium of dance. What exactly is added by this change of medium, and what is lost?

Finally, because *Apollo* in its original performance context (1928, Paris) has been linked to discourses of nationalism (French Monarchy and contemporary fascism)[[5]](#footnote-5), I will re-examine this issue and ask especially how the ballet’s Hellenism – its particular formulation of “Greekness”—functions in the context of these questions. Ultimately I will suggest that critical perspectives that attribute to the ballet a nationalist agenda or significance fall short of accounting for the ballet’s relation to questions of nation.

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO*

Viewed in retrospect and in the context of the Balanchine repertoire as a whole, *Apollo* was a revolutionary modernist work that helped define one of the twentieth century’s most influential contributions to ballet and modern dance: Balanchine’s neoclassicism. Always remaining a standard part of the repertoire, *Apollo* joined other pivotal works (*Four* *Temperaments*, *Agon*, *Jewels*) in the thriving popularity and international influence of the New York City Ballet in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and is still performed regularly. *Apollo* changed ballet by maintaining, but modifying classical technique. It introduced non-classical movements that later became hallmarks of Balanchine’s neoclassicism and its radically austere style and minimal narrative anticipated Balanchine’s later works. *Apollo* was created at a point in the history of ballet - the late 1920s -- when the future of classical ballet had fallen deeply into question. Classical ballet’s peek, had, from most perspectives, passed in the romantic era, and the experimental and bold productions of Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* (1909-1929) were a hope for ballet’s future. *Apollo* premiered near the end of the company’s tenure in Paris, when it met with mixed success, which contrasts with its later popularity as a foundational and programmatic work for Balanchine’s subsequent repertoire in New York City, where he eventually founded the NYC Ballet with Lincoln Kirstein. As Arlene Croce puts it: “Already in . . . *Apollo,* the nature of his gift is completely and purely pronounced. In its most basic manifestations, it reveals itself as a gift for distillation, harmonious design, and logical progression, with a propensity for theme and variation structures. It is a profoundly musical gift, and its philosophical bias is classical. Because Balanchine remained true to his gift to the end of his life. *Apollo* can be looked at as a kind of manifesto, setting out the terms and predicting the direction of many later masterpieces.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Apollo* was not a radical ballet in the way that the highly experimental, sometimes shocking, anti-classical ballets of the *Ballet Russes* were. It had a shock value of its own. In bold contrast to *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky’s music for *Apollo* is radically pared down and ethereal. Written for a strings-only orchestra, its evokes eighteenth century French ballet and opera (Rameau and Lully in particular), and its overall tone is measured; it conveys a prominent sense of awakening. There are only four dancers in the ballet, one man and three women. The ballet’s choreographic lines are unusually sharp and geometric; the dancers often appear in devotional poses. The ballet showcases many of the essential elements of classical ballet, many bold modernizations of that vocabulary, and several tableaux that appear two-dimensional and are strikingly reminiscent of Greek vase paintings and friezes.

The original sets for the ballet evoked the notoriously rugged terrain of Delos where Apollo was born, while a chariot provided a Greek motif that nodded to the French neoclassicism of Louis XIV, the Sun King who had been famous for dancing the role of Apollo in his court ballets. The first costumes, designed by Bauchant, were long tutus with Grecian touches for the Muses and a gold tunic for Apollo. These were not the minimal white costumes that Stravinsky had envisioned and Balanchine eventually adopted, nor were they terribly elaborate. When the ballet was revived in New York its sets and costumes gradually grew more and more spare, white, and abstract.

Stravinsky based the scenario for the ballet on the archaic *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, which most likely dates from the 6th century BC. The hymn to Apollo is one of the longer hymns belonging to a group of Homeric hymns that have been studied by Classicists largely in terms of their dating, performance context, religious significance, and relation to the broader mythological tradition. In her compelling full scale treatment if the hymns, Jenny Strauss Clay has argued persuasively that the hymns are united by a specific purpose: they tell of a stage in the history of the cosmos where various threats were posed to Zeus’s cosmic order, and they explain how order was maintained or restored by granting individual gods specific powers and domains. The hymns on this account are etiological; they explain why the cosmos is ordered the way it is and they fix the specific functions of the Olympian gods.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* praises the god in a relatively solemn tone while it explains the origin of his specific powers, his connection to the island of Delos, and the location of his temple at Delphi. If we had to sum up the impression we get of this god through the hymn, we might accurately say that he is extraordinarily powerful, at times terrifying, and his domains have been established from birth as the lyre, the bow, and prophesy. We get a remote impression of his role in the harmony of festivities, including song and dance, both when the Ionians celebrate him with remarkable grace, and when he is said to join the gods (including all the Muses) on Olympus in their singing and dancing.

The hymn spends considerable time demonstrating Apollo’s fearful power through listing the number of places that rejected Leto’s request to give birth there, though Apollo’s spontaneous growth to adulthood minutes after birth,[[8]](#footnote-8) through his slaying of the monster, Typhon, born to threaten Zeus’ power, and through his transformation into a Dolphin in order to inspire fear and awe in the Cretans sailors he orders to become the keepers of his temple at Delphi. By contrast, Apollo’s connection to dance in the hymn emerges through his self-proclaimed primordial connection with the lyre (and therefore *mousike*, the Greek combination of poetry, music, and dance), and through the explicit mention of dance in the two festivity scenes. In the first, the Ionians do the dancing and singing, and in the second, divine scene on Olympus, Apollo may himself join in the dancing, although the language of the hymn does not make that entirely clear.

The ballet departs from the hymn in striking ways. Balletic Apollo is for some time an awkward youth who only with the Muses’ help eventually learns how to dance. Furthermore, three Muses (who are specifically named) play a prominent role in the narrative. In the ballet, Leto gives birth to a fully adult Apollo, who is nevertheless wrapped in swaddling clothes. The mother disappears leaving her son in the hands of nymphs who help the god with his first awkward movements**.** The nymphs bring him a lute and begin to teach him to play. Left alone, Apollo makes his first attempts to dance. Three anonymous Muses appear (danced by the same three women – there are only four dancers in this ballet). Apollo now leads them as a sort of choreographer trying out some basic movements and lifts. At several points he appears almost to bless them in a kind of choreographic rite of passage. At the end of the prologue Apollo awards each Muse an emblem of her particular gift (a pen, a mask, and a lyre) and with it her identity. We now have on stage Calliope (Muse of poetry), Polyhymnia (Muse of mime), and Terpsichore (Muse of dance). Stravinsky chose these three Muses, he said, because of the close connection they have with dance. Now the ballet proper begins with a kind of Judgment of Paris scenario as each Muse dances a highly individualized variation for Apollo hoping to win his favor. Apollo sits quietly in judgment, rejects the first two, and finally chooses Terpsichore as his favorite and dances with her. In a solo, Apollo now demonstrates his newly developed balletic grace and virtuosity. Terpsichore returns and the two of them dance another *pas de deux*. The music speeds and lightens as the other two Muses rejoin the dance (Apollo does not reject them after all, he only subordinates them to Terpsichore). The ensemble dancing in this section builds the complexity of the piece as a whole. It is lively, playful, and presents some unforgettable configurations, for example of the Muses and Apollo as a moving chariot, and of all three in the sun formation that has now found its way to many book covers. Zeus calls the group to Parnassus, and they solemnly ascend. A final unified pose defines what has been born, developed, experimented with, and finally established: the art of dance. Poetry and mime are subordinate but essential components. Apollo and Terpsichore have established the existence, priority, and nature of dance.

A NEW MYTH OF ORIGIN FOR BALLET

How should we understand the grammar of transformation that shapes this ballet? As both Venuti and Hutcheon make clear, adaptations, like translations, do not simply communicate their source text, but interpret them.[[9]](#footnote-9) Like a translation, an adaptation can be seen as “an act of both intercultural and inter-temporal communication”[[10]](#footnote-10) What, then, are the interpretive mechanisms at work in this ballet when it is viewed as an adaptation of the Homeric hymn? What is the “process of mutation or adjustment” effected by this story being placed into a particular cultural environment? Is it the *same* story?

The question of whether the ballet tells the same story as the hymn only makes sense if one assumes the essentialist position I have already mentioned that posits that there is a definable core essence of the Homeric hymn that either does or does not get accurately carried over into the ballet. Let us table this assumption and ask instead what sorts of selections, additions, subtractions, and refocusing the ballet enacts on the hymn.

Perhaps the most striking overall transformation is the ballet’s dilation on the theme of dance, which plays only a minor role in the hymn. This Apollo is the god of dance, and the entire story of his birth and ascension revolves around establishing the existence and nature of dance. Fascinating from the perspective of gender is the fact that this balletic Apollo moves as an awkward youth until he becomes a graceful dancer, and never inspires the fear and terror so prominent in the hymn. The Muses play a significantly more prominent role in the ballet, where they are reduced to three and cast in the specific identities that connect them to dance (poetry and mime are traditionally parts of dance, but are here subordinated to pure dance). Scholl has pointed out that the contest of the Muses that Apollo judges “adapts and abbreviates a favorite plot line of the nineteenth century ballet: the selection of a mate from a number of suitors, as in the basic plot of both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*.”[[11]](#footnote-11) This connection is not only important and emblematic of Balanchine’s later pattern of alluding to previous ballets by recognizable ingredients. Balanchine goes further by inserting this trope into a Greek context. Others have rightly viewed this episode as a judgment of Paris scenario – and indeed, in this archaic Greek context that allusion emerges. The typical genius of Balanchine is that he reveals this connection between the basic plot line of nineteenth century ballet and the judgment of Paris myth. This demonstrated connection between ballet and Greek myth, we shall see, will prove extremely important to understanding *Apollo*’s significance.

The ballet serves an etiological function, but one different from the hymn: the origin of dance is explained, not the origin of Apollo’s temple at Delphi or his connection with Delos. When viewed as a whole and in relation to the ballet’s new frames of reference, this refraction of the Homeric hymn formulates a narrative that functions with a specific effect. The ballet first and foremost inserts the *Homeric Hymn* into the history of ballet, not only by creating a ballet in 1928 based on the *Homeric Hymn*, but in a much more profound way by creating a myth of origin for ballet itself. As Croce recognizes, Apollo “is a rendition in dance of ideas about dance.”[[12]](#footnote-12) The ballet tells a story of the origin of dance through the birth of Apollo, the gradual formulation of (modified) classical dancing, both the pas de deux and ensemble dancing, and especially through the selection of Terpsichore and her elevation. Apollo, it turns out, does not reject the muses of poetry and mime, but each is subordinated to pure dance.[[13]](#footnote-13) By making classical ballet look Greek, which this ballet does in part through its sculptural aesthetic and reproduction of vase painting tableaus, the hymn becomes an account of ballet’s origin and somewhat self-servingly, this original form of “Greek” ballet is not a pure form of Russian/French Classicism, but Balanchine’s modernized and in some ways undermining modifications of that technique. The fanciful conceit of this ballet is that the *original* form of ballet was Balanchine’s – it is primary and – it came long before the development of nineteenth century classical ballet. Ancient myth and visual culture become incorporated into this myth of origin for ballet.

RE-MEDIATION

Transposing the Homeric hymn from the verbal medium of poetry to the visual/performative/non-verbal medium of dance raises two main issues for us to consider as we examine the nature of this adaptation: the limitations and new possibilities of the medium of dance, and the more fraught issue of implicit hierarchies among media. As Hutcheon explains; “Adaptations are often to a different medium – they are remediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense, as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs.[[14]](#footnote-14) One significant transcoding of the Homeric hymn that occurs in *Apollo* is the loss of the verbal medium and the gain of the vocabulary and syntax of classical ballet. The visual or “ocular”[[15]](#footnote-15) mode of showing and performing take the place of reading or listening to the words of the poem. As we have seen, a narrative is conveyed, and not through words. This performance mode thus teaches us that meaning, sometimes complex meaning, can be conveyed in ways that are not verbal.[[16]](#footnote-16) Just as Stam warns us that in the study of film adaptation there is a danger of “quietly reinscribing” the superiority of literary art to film by privileging seniority as well as verbal over iconographic modes,[[17]](#footnote-17) so too in the case of *Apollo* we must be careful to counter impulses and established histories that would implicitly subordinate the non-verbal, bodily medium of dance to the literary medium of poetry. Opera, for example, has been accused of “denaturing” a novel and reducing it to a cartoon because librettos so radically abbreviate their literary sources.[[18]](#footnote-18) Carrie Preston’s work has done much to remind us of how important dance -- especially dance that represented the primitive past - was to the modernist period generally.[[19]](#footnote-19) Preston also reminds us of those, like William Carlos Williams, who “used dance images to theorize the poetic act and pre-modern language rooted in gesture that could recover an authenticity words lacked.”[[20]](#footnote-20) On some views, then, dance is able to convey meaning that is more authentic and complete than what verbal media can convey.

Symbolist poetics, which were influential at the time of *Apollo*’s creation, offer a way to understand what the particular medium of dance adds to the adaptation of the Homeric hymn. In fact, Symbolism’s anti-realist, Platonizing metaphysics of ideal meaning shaped the aesthetic theories of critic André Levinson, a Russian by birth who had a great influence on the dance world in Paris in the 1920s and reviewed many performances at the Ballets Russes during that period.[[21]](#footnote-21) Levinson held out hope that Classical ballet could be reborn on a new foundation of pure dance, where the formal elements of ballet portray a symbolic world of higher meaning and do not mix with extraneous elements like psychological drama and non-choreographic visual spectacle. During the same decade, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer published his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,[[22]](#footnote-22) which formulated a theory of myth that applied a similar line of thought to myth. According to Cassirer’s theory, mythical thought is the most primitive level of symbolic meaning and distinct from natural language. Mythical thought is expressive meaning charged with emotional significance and it is what underlies mythical consciousness.[[23]](#footnote-23) If dance can be understood to convey a higher realm of non-verbal ideas as Levinson suggests, then it might also be said in the case of *Apollo* to express mythical thought as understood by Cassirer, to express what the words of the Homeric hymn fail to express precisely because they must be formulated verbally. Informed by a Jungian perspective, Martha Graham later explored a similar connection between myth and dance in her many great re-workings of Greek myth.[[24]](#footnote-24) *The Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, then, loses its verbal form as well as many details of its narrative in its transfer to the ballet *Apollo*. Yet it can also be said to gain a whole dimension of meaning made possible by the particular features of its medium.

One final point about re-mediation emerges when Hutcheon draws our attention to another cliché operative in critical discourse on visual and performance arts, the assumption that “showing modes only have one tense: present.”[[25]](#footnote-25) This presumption captures the transient and unrepeatable nature of performance, but wrongly attributes necessary temporal limitations to visual and performing modes. As we have seen, *Apollo* refers to the primitive past as it formulates a myth of origin for ballet, and it alludes to many other stages in the history of ballet, for example to eighteenth century France. Furthermore, *Apollo* forecasts a future by presenting newly modified classical ballet as though it were the original language of dance, thereby suggesting a fresh start for ballet. Croce recognizes that not only Apollo, but many other Balanchine ballets “look backward and forward at the same time” as they implicitly formulate a “process of recapitulation and forecast”.[[26]](#footnote-26)

MAKING BALLET GREEK

The “Greekness” of *Apollo* is not a single thing, not one particular conception of what it means to be Greek, or archaic, or Classical. Rather, both in its initial cultural context in Paris, and in its subsequent movements into American culture, the ballet entered many frames of reference that define Greekness differently. For example, during its performances in the 1920s, *Apollo* can be said to have signified by its archaic Greek story and style the elite, retrospective aesthetics of Louis XIV’s France and its monarchical politics,[[27]](#footnote-27) a modernist drive toward the primitive,[[28]](#footnote-28) an assertion of Nietzsche’s Apollonian conception of art,[[29]](#footnote-29) an assertion of Nietzsche’s Dionysian conception of art,[[30]](#footnote-30) or an example of modernism’s turn to Greece as a way of conjuring ghosts of the past or reanimating statues.[[31]](#footnote-31) When it later appeared in New York we could say that its Greekness signified its foundational and programmatic nature for the whole of Balanchine repertoire.[[32]](#footnote-32) I would like to suggest an additional context that gives meaning to *Apollo*’s Greekness, or rather to its attempt to make ballet seem “Greek” through its synthesis of classical balletic forms with Greek mythology and aesthetic structures.

Whether one considers ballet to have originated historically in the fifteenth century court of Catherine de’ Medici (as most histories of ballet do), or in eighteenth century Russia with the establishment of the first imperial ballet school by Empress Anna in 1738, it was a particular preoccupation of late nineteenth century French artistic culture to assign an origin of ballet to ancient Greece. Many factors, including recent archaeological discoveries and an obsession with authenticity, play into this interest, and one book in particular garnered considerable popularity as it painstakingly laid out an academic case for ballet’s Greek origins. In 1895, composer and theatre director Maurice Emmanuel published in Paris *Essai Sur L’Orchestique Grecque*, later translated into English as *The Antique Greek Dance After Sculptured and Painted Figures* (1916). Based on his study of hundreds of Greek vase paintings and sculptures (the book contains 600 figures, most of which are drawings of figures from vase painting or sculpture, as well as photographic studies of contemporary subjects executing proposed movements after the ancient sources), Emmanuel argued that the basic vocabulary of classical ballet was already present in ancient Greek dancing. The primary difference was that classical ballet had a more refined technique, while ancient Greek dancing made greater expressive and natural use of the upper body, something that ballet lacked at the time. Emmanuel’s methodology was deeply problematic, and yet if we view his purpose as an attempt to inspire much needed innovation in dance rather than to establish historical facts, his book could be said both to have made a compelling case, and to have inspired the innovation it prescribed.[[33]](#footnote-33) André Levinson responded critically to Emmanuel’s claim that ancient Greek dancing was more “natural” and insisted instead that it showed evidence of artificially imposed technique and stylization throughout.[[34]](#footnote-34) Even this criticism of Emmanuel’s position seeks to maintain a strong affinity between ancient Greek dance and the ballet of the time, and thereby to connect the classicism of ancient Greece with balletic classicism. Given Levinson’s prominent place the Paris dance world of the 1920s, we can say that Emmanuel’s ideas were still alive and well at the time.

*Apollo* did not to seek to establish or reiterate the literal historical position that ballet owes its origins to ancient Greece. However, when viewed in the context of Emmanuel’s work and its influence, *Apollo* continued and modified a trend of positing a Greek origin for ballet. *Apollo* defended its thesis through its narrative and, perhaps even more compellingly, through its choreographic blending of Greco-Roman with classical balletic forms. To the extent that *Apollo* succeeded in creating this synthesis,[[35]](#footnote-35) it portrays the fantasy that ballet originated in ancient Greece. Considering its ultimate success in becoming a foundational work for the Balanchine repertoire, *Apollo* demonstrates how artistic ingenuity, rather than historical proof, accomplishes such a feat. Re-animating and transforming the Greek myth of Apollo in a work of astonishing beauty and force results in gains for both ballet and for the Greek myth: the ballet launches innovative features that herald a new future for the art form, and the archaic Greek myth of Apollo evolves into a new kind of prominence.

*APOLLO* AND THE QUESTION OF NATION

Through its Rameau-like music, its theme of Apollo as the god-king of dance, and its allusions to French neoclassicism of the eighteenth century, *Apollo* clearly signals Louis XIV (who himself danced the role of Apollo in *Ballet de la Nuit*) and France’s monarchic past.[[36]](#footnote-36) If we view these elements as the primary unifying features of the ballet’s significance and conclude that *Apollo* is essentially a reactionary, nationalistic, backward looking homage to a lost classicism, we will fail to do justice to other features of the ballet, some of which contradict this more limited picture, all of which complicate it.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Tim Scholl has pointed out with great insight that the role of Terpsichore in Apollo “acknowledges the distinctly Russian contributions to the Western art form”[[38]](#footnote-38) As the “winner” of the contest, and as the dancer whose choreography is most fluidly classical, Terpsichore’s dancing can be said to define the height of Russian classical ballet, now inflected with Balanchine’s modernism. When *Apollo* travels to New York to become eventually a foundational work, it becomes known as “American” ballet, along with the rest of the Balanchine repertoire. Even if we consider the ballet only in its initial Parisian incarnation, the idea that it functions mainly as a nationalistic ode to French neoclassicism is insufficient to account for it connection to nations. Is the ballet Russian? French? Neoclassical French? Ancient Greek? American?

Furthermore, viewing *Apollo* as fundamentally conservative flies in the face of the ballet’s innovative artistic features, as well as its integration of elements that move across cultural strata, from high-brow to low-brow. Allusions to Michaelangelo, Louis XIV, Greek sculpture and vase painting combine with the “modernist brazenness”[[39]](#footnote-39) of Calliope’s attempt to speak, hand gestures based on Balanchine’s perception of an electric sign in Piccadilly Circus,[[40]](#footnote-40) and jazz movements inspired by Josephine Baker.[[41]](#footnote-41) *Apollo*, indeed, accomplishes a “daring marriage of classicism and modernism”[[42]](#footnote-42) Dancers who performed the ballet in Paris remarked on how the audience was “stunned” by Balanchine’s modernist departures from classical technique, for example, the flexed feet, the angular shapes, the configuration of a single male dancer with three women.[[43]](#footnote-43) The resulting stylistic amalgam was typical of modernism: “The crossing of national boundaries and cultural strata created the feeling of the modern not only through movement but also through a challenge to what had been considered appropriate of normal before.”[[44]](#footnote-44) *Apollo* may not be overtly and single-mindedly anti-traditional, but it would be limiting to assume that innovation cannot be compatible with contributing to tradition. One of Balanchine’s biographers, Robert Gottlieb takes it for granted that for Balanchine “there was no contradiction between creative force and the impersonal objective limitations of classical style.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Ancient Greece is not a national culture, and although the use of Greek mythology in *Apollo* and elsewhere can signal the coded privilege of French monarchy, anti-Soviet nostalgia for all that is “classical”, or a general withdrawal into a utopian vision of the past, we have seen that the Greekness of *Apollo* functions every bit as much as a mechanism of innovation and a blurring of national boundaries. Just as Gaborik and Harris have suggested that, because it is linked to Balanchine’s global neo-Liberalism, Italian futurism should not be reduced to a form of fascism,[[46]](#footnote-46) I would suggest that the meaning of *Apollo*’s Greekness is an irreducible and ever-shifting plurality.

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1. Stam 2012, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Martindale 2006, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Martindale 2006, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bortolotti and Hutcheon 2007 compare the success of adaptation to evolutionary success in biology. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Garafola 1989 115-122; Taruskin 1993 on Stravinsky and fascism. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Croce 1998, 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Clay 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Slater 1971 on Apollo’s triumphant escape from the maternal clutch – the goal of all male gods. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Venuti 2007 and Hutcheon 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bassnett 2002, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Scholl 1994, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Croce 1998, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On the modernist desire to purify artforms and rid them of inessential features see Greenberg 1960; on André Levinson’s vision of pure dance see Acocella and Garafola 1991,10. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hutcheon 2012, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Critics have spoken of the “ocularcentrism” of the modernist period. See Marshik 2015, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Hutcheon 2012, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Stam 2012, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Hutcheon 2012, 38 and Honig 2001, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Preston 2011, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Preston 2011, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Acocella and Garafola 1991 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The three volumes were published in 1923, 1925, and 1929. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Schultz 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Bannerman 2010, Ledbetter 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hutcheon 59/63. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Croce 1998, 261, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Garafola 1989, 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Haynes 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Stanger 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Scholl 1994, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Kolocotroni 2012; Gross 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Croce 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Naerebout 2010; Smith 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Levinson “Some Commonplaces on the Dance” in Acocella and Garafola 1991, 27-34.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Bellow 2010 argues that the different classicisms deliberately clash. I would argue that in some versions of the ballet they blend quite harmoniously, and I would emphasize the masterful integration of Greco-Roman and balletic classicisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Garafola 1989, 117 lays out these connections persuasively. Cf. Taruskin’s view (Taruskin 1993) of the connection between Stravinsky’s neoclassicism and fascism. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The same point holds if we give primacy to Taruskin’s view of the political connotations of Stravinsky’s neoclassicism. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Scholl 1994, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Joseph 2002, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Joseph 2002, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Butkas 2010, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Denby, 1953, 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Danilova’s remarks quoted in Joseph 2002, 87-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Marshik 2015, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Gottlieb 2004, 435. It was also SStravinsky’s considered view that creative originality *depended upon* formal constraints. See Stravinsky 1942. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Gaborik and Harris 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)